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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BERLIN 000731

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TAGS: PREL PHUM IR GM

SUBJECT: IRAN ELECTION UPDATE: BOTH SIDES ATTEMPTING TO
KEEP SITUATION UNDER CONTROL, SAYS BERLIN CONTACT

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Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Jeffrey Rathke for reasons
1.4.(b)/(d).

¶1. (S/NF) SUMMARY: A key Germany-based Iranian exile opposition figure, who claims to have access to the camps of presidential candidates Mirhossein Moussavi and Mehdi Karroubi, noted June 18 that both sides of the now-divided political elite are trying to keep the situation under control for fear of a bloody crackdown and broader instability. According to the contact, a variety of key "Islamic opposition" groupings have coalesced to coordinate further efforts behind the scenes. The contact predicted that Iranian clerics will, for now, remain silent, particularly as Assembly of Experts (AoE) chair Aliakbar Hashemi Rafsanjani meets in Qom with AoE members. He also called on the USG and EU to encourage UNSYG Ban to offer to mediate on the ground between the two sides, noting that such an effort would give the opposition additional cover to operate, even if Supreme Leader Khamene'i rejects such an offer. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (S/NF) A Germany-based Iranian exile opposition figure who maintains excellent contacts inside Iran shared his insights on June 18 with Iran Watcher into the latest developments on the ground in Iran. This longtime post contact claims to be in close contact with campaigns of presidential candidates Mirhossein Moussavi and Mehdi Karroubi, and has been a reliable source in past conversations.

¶3. (S/NF) BOTH SIDES ATTEMPTING TO KEEP SITUATION UNDER CONTROL: According to the contact, both sides of the now-divided Iranian political elite are trying to keep the situation under control. Should more demonstrators die at the hands of Iranian security forces, this would lead to a "complete destruction" by the security forces of what he referred to as the "Islamic opposition." This opposition is not strong enough at the moment to call for general strikes, he added. The immediate goal of security authorities at the moment is to keep the "Islamic opposition" movement without a leadership structure below Moussavi, he said, pointing at the arrest of key figures like former Iranian VP Mohammed Ali Abtahi. The contact downplayed the arrest of "secular" civil society activists like human rights lawyer Abdulfattah Soltani and other activists "outside of the system," noting that they do not figure largely in this clash between the system's elites.

¶4. (S/NF) OPPOSITION COALESCING ON EFFORTS & TACTICS: According to the contact, a coalition of the Islamic opposition, students (including the Adver-e Tahkim-e Vahdat), and artists who oppose the Iranian government's position on

the election results has coalesced in the last day. The contact emphasized that this group will not appear in public, but are instead working behind the scenes to agree upon joint efforts and tactics. The group's latest approved tactic is adding the chant "Ya Hossein" to nighttime religious chanting from residential roofs that has been taking place all week across Iranian cities. (NOTE: the phrase is a double entendre referring to both the third Imam (and key Shiite martyr) and Moussavi.) The tactic could serve to discourage violence by devout security force members, said the contact. The contact added that there are reports of security forces being stationed on roofs last night (June 17) to discourage the evening chants. When asked if he knew the source of the seven-point "Protester's Manifesto" distributed at the large-scale June 15 Tehran demonstration, he noted that he did not know its origin but doubted that such an anti-IRIG list of demands (which included calls for the replacement of Supreme Leader Khamenei) would have been generated by Moussavi's camp.

¶5. (S/NF): CLERICS LIKELY TO STAY QUIET FOR NOW: As for the clerical elite, the contact said not to expect any additional statements by individual clerics. The contact stated that Assembly of Experts chair Aliakbar Hashemi Rafsanjani is currently in the city of Qom, meeting with Assembly of Experts members, but cautioned that the Assembly of Experts is also unlikely to speak out in the immediate future.

¶6. (S/NF) LOOMING CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS IF AHMADINEJAD FORCED TO STEP DOWN? The contact noted that should Supreme Leader Ali Khamene'i decide to force Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to step down as President "for the will of the people," the situation could nonetheless result in a constitutional crisis. According to the contact, while the IRI Constitution

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provides guidance in case of the death of the President, there is no clear guidance as to how a new President would be appointed or selected in the case of a resignation.

¶7. (S/NF) ROLE FOR UNSYG BAN? As for the role of the international community, the contact called on the EU and U.S.G. to encourage UNSYG Ban to offer to go to Iran and mediate between the groups. Such an offer, even if the Supreme Leader rejects it, could give the opposition cover, said the contact.

¶8. (S/NF) COMMENT: While some of our contact's statements are a reflection of general press reporting and conclusions drawn by other analysts, a number of his comments, particularly regarding cooperation among various opposition subgroups, shed additional insight into events on the ground.

END COMMENT.

Koenig